

Ilford 0, Wycombe W. 2

CHRISTMAS is the season of charity and goodwill to all men. So, in the name of traditional spirit, let's say that neither Saturday's Isthmian League outing, nor referee Lewis's handling of it, rated anything but poor, and leave it at that, writes **Mike Whitesman**.

On the deceptively bumpy Newbury Park pitch, Wycombe took up where they left off against Maidstone seven days earlier — in a comparatively meandering, unco-ordinated state.

Only Ilford, displaying the confidence and at least some of the sparkle from their ten game unbeaten run, offered a marked contrast to Maidstone. There was nothing either meek or pedestrian about their approach.

And, after a goalless first half, Wanderers needed no red light to warn them of the possible pitfalls ahead.

By delaying Peter Drabwell's clearance papers, league leaders Sutton United had indirectly done themselves a bad turn. For, deprived of such a powerful goalscorer, Ilford lacked the only factor between them and possible victory over second placed Wanderers.

No question

What Drabwell might have done with the potentially match-winning mid-field support of Maurice Tate is a question the Blues can be thankful never needed answering.

Instead, Wycombe put on their shooting boots in the second period to claim two just about deserved points, while both Enfield (at Wealdstone) and St. Albans (at Woking) were going under.

Sutton's single goal success at Oxford City left this complexion at the top:

	P.	pts.
Sutton Utd.	26	43
Wycombe W.	22	35
Hendon	24	33
Enfield	24	33
Barking	27	31
Oxford City	25	31
St. Albans C.	20	29

Wycombe — minus the services of Les Hartridge as link — gambled on placing Ted Powell in midfield while adding an extra defender, Ian Rundle, to partner skipper John Delaney, and using Bernier Bremer and Tony Horseman on the flanks.

The record books will show the switch worked. But there was nothing convincing about any part of it and to Keith Blunt in particular, much of the credit is directed.

Celebrating his appointment as the F.A.'s regional coach for London and the South East, Blunt broke up almost everything former Sutton winger, Terry Howard schemed. He also gave short change to Chris Ballard.

Ilford's recent spate of success suggested before kick off that Wanderers were not in for an easy time of it. Indeed half

time's blank scoresheet emphasised not only the low quality of 45 minutes' football, but also the Essex team's insistence on pushing their visitors whenever possible.

Yet Wycombe were unlucky not to take an early lead when Keith Searle shot against the outside of the post, and Barry Barker's return was charged down after eight minutes.

Eight minutes later, and Collins almost booted disastrously with an over-strong backpass which conceded a corner but could equally have meant an own goal with keeper James beaten for pace.

James' counterpart, John Maskell looked reasonably safe in his handling, yet obviously could have done without the occasional unorthodox bounce of the ball.

He covered just such a problem when Shaw kicked goalwards in the 26th minute, and, 60 seconds later, his boot alone blocked Fyfield's otherwise unimpeded route.

It was a measure of Ilford's energy and, in particular Tate's scheming, that Maskell was again in action on 38 minutes, changing direction in a split second to bring down Howard's header after a scything move between Jackson and Tate.

Ilford morale grew with each minute. But, after the interval, Wycombe pressure dominated the exchanges. Ellis cleared Delaney's header off the line in the 47th minute, only for Bremer to strike a telling blow four minutes later.

Bernier lined up a fine left footed shot from ten yards out to punish a poor slip by the home backs.

Still unconvinced — and, rightly so — by Wycombe's football on the day, Ilford fruitlessly tried barging back on terms via Tate.

Number two

But the 60th minute yielded another goal for the title chasers, as Horseman dazed everyone by sending his corner kick soaring directly into the net from the left hand corner flag.

James landed flat on his back inside the goal, and Ilford claimed an illegal push. But Mr. Lewis stood firm to allow the score.

If nothing else, the referee always maintained the courage of his convictions.

At long last, Wanderers could breathe a little easier, and looked all the better for such freedom, while Ilford remained for the most part unimpressed.

Nonetheless Horseman rapped a post and Searle again found the woodwork — crossbar this time — to maintain Wycombe's second half impetus.

Even quick raiding defender Paul Fuschiello was allowed licence for a late solo run in injury time. Unfortunately his reward was injury himself and he hobbled off to be replaced by the patient Vince Faulkner for all of 15 seconds.

ILFORD: P. James; C. Ellis, D. Guiver, D. Collins, P. Anderson, F. Shaw, C. Ballard, M. Tate, D. Fyfield, B. Jackson, T. Howard, Sub: G. Lilington (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Fuschiello, Sub: V. Faulkner, 90th min; C. Ellington, E. Powell, J. Delaney, I. Rundle, B. Gemm, B. Baker, K. Searle, L. Pritchard, A. Horseman.

Referee: R. S. Lewis.
Half-time: 0-0. Goalscorers: Wycombe — B. Bremer (51), A. Horseman (60).